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"IT SOUNDS WEAK, BUT HE SAVED MY LIFE": READING FRIENDSHIP IN TIM WINTON'S "BIG WORLD" AND "THE TURNING"

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INTRODUCTION

Tim Winton is one of the most celebrated Australian writers. He is a vocational writer that, being twenty-one, was awarded the 1981 Australian/Vogel National Award for his novel *An Open Swimmer* (1982). His literary work includes twelve novels, six volumes for children and young adults, three dramatic pieces and three short story collections. His latest novel is *The Shepherd's Hut*, published in 2018. One of the most remarkable aspects in his fiction is his account of everyday Australian lives. His stories deal with the idea of what it means to be an "ordinary" Australian. This might be the reason why he is so popular in his native country, while literary criticism has not paid much attention to his work. However, he has won the Miles Franklin Literary Award four times and has twice been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Other recognitions include the Western Australian Council Award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the Wilderness Society Environment Award, the Christina Stead Prize for fiction or The Queensland Fiction Prize. He is considered a literary celebrity in Australia, and this contributes to the interest of this dissertation. His work is not so widely recognized in European countries, and he has only been translated into Spanish once, with the novel "Música de la Tierra" (Ediciones Destino, 2008). The study of his work in this dissertation might serve to arouse an interest in this great author and bring some recognition to his figure in Spain.

It might not be far-fetched to assert that Tim Winton is a man of contradictions: he is, in McCredden's words a "well-documented family man and somewhat of a loner". "He chooses to live away from urban centres, in places where most readers do not live and he maintains a firm and intriguing distance between author and critic" (McCredden 1). And he, who has been apparently away from traumatic experiences, depicts trauma and wounded characters with an outstanding fidelity. In Barbara Arizti's words

> in marked contrast to Winton's story of self-confidence and success, the lives of his fictional creatures are often scarred by trauma in various shapes. His novels and short stories are populated by deserted or widowed husbands and wives, terminally ill characters, neglected children, alcoholic fathers, nasty episodes of wife-battering. (Arizti 175)

McCredden and O'Reilly consider that Winton's fiction is "literary and popular, and therefore a remarkable barometer of Australian culture" (3). His work, they continue, is "vernacular and lyrical, optimistic and dark, asking in nuanced ways what it means to be alive in contemporary Australia" (3). Therefore, it is of major interest to study some of his characters' lives to understand his vision of Australia. The adjective brutal can also be applied to his writing: there is no middle ground for Winton and the situations that his characters go through are terrible. We can consider Winton a local writer (and this might explain his recognition within the borders of his country and his own personal rejection towards Europe), but his themes and interests are also an analysis of what it is to be human and to question meaning.

In this dissertation I analyse two short stories belonging to *The Turning* (1994). *The Turning* is Tim Winton's third collection of stories after *The Scission* and *Minimum of Two*. It is, in Bridget Grogan's words,

> a cycle of seventeen stories. Interlinked by recurring characters in and from the fictional working-class harbor town of Angelus on the southern coast of Australia, the stories are also thematically interwoven: each story 'turns' on the experience of disappointment and/or loss (200).

Specifically, I will be dealing with the short stories "Big World" and "The Turning", to illustrate the characters' struggle to find meaning in life within the Australian borders and how friendship helps them get through it. The complexity of the characters

and their desperate search for a purpose in life —a search that will be fruitless—, are the starting point to analyze "Big World" (the short story that opens *The Turning),* and "The Turning", the short story that gives its title to the volume. About "Big World", on the cover of the Picador edition, it has been said that

> Winton has not only captured the tragic significance and the sheer wonder of one man´s difficult adolescence but of a town and, by extension, a whole country. Winton's *Cloudstreet* is commonly considered the great Australian Novel. "Big World", which opens *The Turning,* could be the great Australian short story.

The two protagonists of this short story, Biggie and the first-person narrator (we get to know every minor detail in his life but we never learn his name), impersonate youth in Western Australia. They function as antagonists in their views of life, but somehow, they complement each other. Each one of them represents half of the landscape of Australia, the protagonist being the rebel, the urban side, and Biggie the conformist that belongs to rural Australia, and by learning about their bonding, we have access to the full picture.

"Big World" is the story of two adolescents that, after five years of high school, have failed to pass their final tests and do not get a place at University. Therefore, they cannot leave Angelus and go North, to the promised land. They work in the harbor "hosing blood off the floors" (2). The narrator confesses in the second page of the short story that "sometimes I can see me and Biggie out there as old codgers, anchored to the friggin place, stuck forever" (2). It is this fear of being stuck forever that drives them to buy a 1967 Kombi and go to Perth. It is a symbolic trip to rebel against their hypothetical future. The trip, as we might imagine, does not end well. During this trip we learn the difficulties and constraints of their lives. There is a juxtaposition of the two characters, as much as a profound analysis of the theme of friendship. We see life not only through the eyes of the narrator, but also through Biggie's, by means of the successful incursion of

the narrator in his mind. By witnessing this, we are witnessing the future of rural Australia. In the following pages both characters will be analyzed in depth, questioning the foundations of their relationship and establishing a comparative with the friendship of the two female characters, Raelene and Sherry, in "The Turning".

"The Turning" is a brutal short story in which Raelene is a mistreated woman who is repeatedly raped and hit by her husband's. As Hanna Schurholz points out, "Tim Winton's female characters show a strong tendency towards self-threatening behaviour, transcience and ferocity". She also states that "female death and self-harm are constantly present" (96). The fact that Raelene does not abandon her husband could be obviously considered self-threatening behaviour. The complexity of this relationship will be analysed, but the interest will be mainly in the relationship between Raelene and Sherry. Sherry seems to be her savior: "…She listened. She gave a fuck. There was kindness in her. Straightaway she was a friend" (135). On Tuesday nights, Raelene goes out to Dart nights (her own refuge with some other women), but then cancels it to meet Sherry and her husband Dan. From the very first moment she is her confessor and a shoulder to cry on. The relationship evolves throughout the story but, at the end of it, Sherry is not able to physically save Raelene from her husband (or from herself).

After analysing the two short stories separately, the two relationships will be intertwined in order to draw some conclusions from the perspective of gender and the actual repercussion on the lives of the characters. Tim Winton's tales deal with life (with all its layers and complexities and subplots). This essay, therefore, will analyze the lives of these characters considering friendship as a promising refuge when it gets complicated.

"BIGGIE AND ME: WE'RE FEVERISH WITH ANTICIPATION": ANALYSIS OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO MALE PROTAGONISTS IN WINTON´S "BIG WORLD"

In the very first line of the short story "Big World", the narrator refers to his own existence in plural terms: "Biggie and me" (1). The reader learns that their friendship is the protagonist of the tale. In the same page, we know that disappointment and deception will also be key to understand the text: "…we're feverish with anticipation…But after the initial celebrations, nothing really happens, not even summer itself" (1). This is Winton's confession of what is going to happen: young people can expect nothing from the future in Western Australia. "Big World" "describes in the first person the narrator´s teenage friendship with a working-class boy called 'Biggie', a road trip that they take and the narrator's desperation to leave the confinement of Angelus behind him" (Grogan 203). This happens right after they have failed their tests to access university. While Biggie seems not to care, the narrator has suicidal thoughts when he gets the results: "I can't tell Biggie this but missing out on uni really stings. When the results came I cried my eyes out. I thought about killing myself" (5). The juxtaposition of the two characters is made clear from the beginning: the narrator has aspirations, while Biggie belongs to Angelus. "He´s content, he belongs" (5). However, the bond is also specified: they share a tin with savings to buy a car together. The narrator really cares about Biggie but is not brave enough to confess his desire to escape: "that I dream of escaping, of pissing off North to find some blue sky" (2). This is interesting. The reader appreciates the friendship as honest and sincere, but we also know that the narrator is keeping things from Biggie. This, in fact, is repeated several times throughout the story: "Dreams of the big world beyond. Manila. Monterrey. Places in books. In all these years I never let on. But then Biggie's never in the picture with me. In those daydreams he doesn't figure, and maybe

I'm guilty about that" (6). It is as in those relationships in which you feel secure, happy, comforted, but you are aware that eventually your paths will split up: different goals in life. Even though the relationship is pure, healthy, there is the question of interest: Biggie is convenient for the protagonist while he lives in Angelus, something that he expects to be temporary. The protagonist is a Wintonian male protagonist, with dreams and melancholia, and Biggie represents the rural Australian male, with no aspirations beyond an easy job and an easy life: "In his head he's always seen himself at the meatworks or the cannery while he inherits the salmon-netting license from his old man" (5). There is the question of legacy and inheritance, even though we learn that Biggie is mistreated by his father: "-but Biggie has bigger things to fear. His old man will beat the shit out of him when he finds out" (4). In light of this, we can assert that Biggie´s father stands for the rural, brutal man in Australia that threatens their family, a figure that connects with the character of Max in "The Turning".

In spite of the differences and the secrets between the characters, there is loyalty in the relationship. "I'm going nuts here. Until now, out of loyalty, I've kept it to myself" (5). A loyalty that is born from gratitude. It is remarkable how the two protagonists create their bond: "It sounds weak, but he saved my life" (7). This sentence should be retained, since it is the connection with the other short story that will be analysed: Sherry also tries to save Raelene's life. The friendship, in both cases, is forged out of violence. In "Big World" the protagonist is repeatedly abused in school by a kid called Toni Macoli: "…on the second Monday of term I was shoved into a hedge, tripped in the corridor so that my books sprayed across the linoleum, and had my fingers slammed in a desk" (7). He suffers bullying for weeks until one day Biggie punches Toni Macoli so hard that he sends him to hospital. Biggie Bonson began then his two weeks' suspension. "That's how it started. A single decisive act of violence that joined me to Biggie forever" (8). A few lines later,

the narrator confesses: “If Biggie hadn’t come along I don’t know what would have become of me” (8). Violence is, therefore, a uniting entity in the text, which could be contradictory. But, as we know, in Tim Winton’s fiction “the contradictoriness of human condition is everywhere: tensions between the human ability to make meaning and the obliterating power of accident or temporality; between palpable, joyful intimacy and the ravages of violence in relationships (McCredden and O’Reilly, 4). The background of violence that Biggie has is also important, and we return to the figure of Biggie’s father: “Since Winton is both a son and a father, it is no surprise that fatherhood and father-son relationships recur in his work” (O’Reilly 162). Winton tends to deconstruct the notion of masculinity when dealing with fatherhood, and, as Bárbara Arizti points out, “the examples of caring fathers, who challenge patriarchal norms and show a high degree of involvement with their children, outnumber these more negative figures” (280). Biggie’s father, who consistently beats him, would be an exception and a negative figure. Tim Winton’s fiction wants to escape from stereotypes and reflect the complex nature of human behaviour, and to question some of our assumptions: we see violence as a degrading force, but what if it is precisely violence that creates a real bond between people? This is the case of the narrator and Biggie.

To secure their relationship, the narrator and Biggie decide to undertake a journey to Perth. While they are driving, the narrator observes Biggie and tries to analyse his friend and their friendship. The first assumption is that “I suppose we’re wrong for each other, Biggie and me. He´s not a very introspective bloke. Sometimes he makes me restless. But we get along pretty well most of the time” (8). It is strange that the protagonist defines the relationship by its wrongness. He continues showing their differences: “Biggie loves all the practical stuff, reading maps, trying survival techniques, learning bushcraft. I’m more into the birds and plants and stars and things” (9). The

narrator wants to make clear how different they are. There is a juxtaposition that Tim Winton uses to illustrate the realities in Australian life: on the one hand, the conformist type, rooted in the small town, Biggie; on the other hand, the dreamer, the intellectual type that belongs to the city but cannot achieve his goals. The dreamer is also a frustrated being. He describes Biggie as a *funny bugger* and highlights repeatedly his lack of hygiene: "he can fart whole sentences, a skill St Augustine admired in others. He's not much for hygiene. His hair's always greasy and that navel smells like toejam" (9). The reader also learns on that same page of the story that the protagonist writes the academic essays for Biggie: "His sole academic success was his essay on the demise of Led Zeppelin, but then I wrote that for him" (9) But Tim Winton's ironic tone in the description makes the reader appreciate Biggie and feel sympathy for him. It is also clear that the narrative voice of the story loves and appreciates Biggie, even though he describes their relationship as a burden sometimes: "Friendship, I suppose, comes at a price" (9). If we analyse this, we see that the relationship between the two male friends is contradictory, something that is clearly Wintonian. The price he has to pay is to renounce love. Unlike the protagonist, Biggie is not popular with girls. The narrator is in love with Briony Nevis, they kiss and they live a teenage love, he even writes poems to her but he admits that "I don't go on with Briony Lewis the way I badly want to because I know Biggie will be left behind" (10). Then he continues: "But I never touch her again. Out of loyalty" (10). Loyalty is brought up again, as it seems to be the cornerstone of the relationship. He feels, in a way, superior to Biggie: "I made him look brighter than he was and me a little dimmer"(10), but, contradictorily enough, when a female hitchhiker named Meg joins the trip and creates a special bond with Biggie, it is the narrator who feels displaced: "Biggie's never had much luck with girls. I should be glad for him. But I'm totally pissed off" (13). He is, in a word, jealous. In this single sentence Tim Winton

gives us a masterclass of the complexity of human relationships. The narrator feels indebted to Biggie and that is the main reason for their bond, but he also wants him for himself. *Neither with you nor without you.* There is a connection with the idea of superiority that eats him: "…is the way he's enjoying being brighter than her, being a step ahead, feeling somehow senior and secure in himself. It's me all over. It's how I am with him and it´s not pretty" (13). The protagonist feels remorseful because he realizes, in a sort of epiphany, what the essence of the relationship is. At this point the reader doubts about the frankness of the feeling.

There are several epiphanic moments throughout the short story. There is a moment during the trip in which the protagonist vividly recalls the last night of school and the bonfire at Massacre point: "Someone had a kite in the air and its tail was on fire…so beautiful I almost cried… I had a power and a promise I'd never sensed before. The fact that the burning kite consumed its own tail and fluttered down into the sea didn't really register" (12). On the one hand, there is this moment of present beauty that compensates the struggles in life; on the other, the final destiny of the kite: consumed by itself, it will sink. This symbol connects clearly with the breakdown of the car that ends up in a fire. The dreamed utopia of a successful runaway cut short by the reality of some young people in rural Australia: they have no money for a decent car. In that moment, the narrator anticipates the future, using analepsis: "in a year Biggie will be dead in a mining accident in the Pilbara and I'll be reading Robert Louis Stevenson at his funeral while his relatives shuffle and mutter with contempt" (p. 14). He even pictures Tony Macoli as Australia's richest merchant. This abrupt ending of the relationship in which we know about Biggie's tragic finale, contrasts with the present moment of peace and fulfillment that he feels with Biggie standing on the salt lake at sunset: another epiphany. He melancholically beholds its present life, while a few moments ago he has recalled his

past, “the presence of the past is unavoidable, it’s there in all my work. The past has its consolations but often it’s just a knife twisting in an old wound” (Winton in Rossiter), and anticipates a future of misery. As T.S. Eliot said, and I quote: “Time present and time past/Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past” (*Four Quartets*). In the inevitability of time and the effects of the wounds and the past, the characters just stand and watch, that is what we humans do. We stand and watch. This cycle of life and the melancholic attitude of the characters towards it, is also reflected in Grogan’s words:

> Like the narrator of “Big World”, at their most complete and tender Winton’s men embrace transience and the inevitable loss this entails; simultaneously, they acknowledge the wide beauty of the temporal world and the love of and for others that is both impermanent and yet eternal. (217)

The short story closure reads like this: “I don’t care what happens beyond this moment. In the hot Northern dusk, the world suddenly gets big around us, so big we just give in and watch” (Winton, “Big World” 15). After all and finding out in the last words that the narrator writes the story in retrospect, we can conclude that “Big World” is a love story. It is the narrator’s love towards his friend Biggie, a story that happened in a faraway past but that he vividly rewrites in the present, giving it the prominence it deserves and recalling it as a *turning* point in his life. If writing is an act of contemplation —we contemplate life and try to make sense out of it afterwards—, the final contemplation of the narrator and Biggie is worth writing about.

“THERE WAS KINDNESS IN HER: STRAIGHTWAWAY SHE WAS A FRIEND”: FEMALE FRIENDSHIP IN TIM WINTON´S “THE TURNING”

Literature professor Bridget Grogan talks about the short story in these terms: "The turning" presents Raelene, Max's wife, as its focus, exploring her violent and abusive marriage, her fascination with two new-found Christian friends, and her eventual conversion to a pitiful and personal form of Christianity" (203). Raelene, the protagonist of "The Turning", the short story that gives the collection its name, is a young woman who feels trapped in the caravan where she lives with her husband and her two kids. Her own personal cage. The caravan park where she lives is like Angelus for the narrator of "Big world": a place to escape from if only she had the means. From the very first moment the reader feels the asphyxiating routine and atmosphere in which Raelene is sunk, and just by reading a few lines, we are aware of her terrible reality: she is a mistreated woman: "Sunshine felt pure and silky on her skin; it took her mind off the chipped tooth and her throbbing lip" (134).

Raelene is described on the first page of the short story as the *queen in the house* type, being in charge of the house chores while her husband works. However, her house sucks; it is not even a proper house. It is in the laundry that she meets Sherry, her *saviour*. As it already happened in "Big World", the other person of interest in the tale —Sherry in this case— is already introduced at the beginning of the story. Friendship is going to be the cornerstone of the tale. They are also united through violence, but "the turning" Tim Winton introduces is outstanding. "That must have hurt" (p. 2) —Sherry says when she sees Raelene at the laundry. She feels ashamed, as if her face burned, but Sherry refers to the stud in her navel. Psychologically speaking, what Tim Winton does by penetrating the mind of a mistreated woman, is more than remarkable. We feel Raelene's relief when she realizes that Sherry refers to the piercing and not to her face: mistreatment is a burden she carries, but she does not want to share it with other people, as if it was something to be ashamed of. Nevertheless, the ironic scene continues. Raelene, showing gratitude,

continues the conversation referring to her tattoo. Sherry reads it: *"Handle with care".* It is then that the protagonist realizes what her own personal situation is: "Raelene felt stupid then. She knew what a fucking irony it was" (134).

The bond has already been created and, furthermore, Tim Winton has used three very definite traits to stereotype the protagonist: the blow on her face, her unhappiness being in charge of the house chores and the fact that she has a piercing and a tattoo. The reader can already picture the protagonist as a young woman belonging to a low social class imprisoned in a life she did not plan for herself. Hanna Schurholz asserts that "female death and self-harm are constantly present, either as an explicit experience, a haunting memory or an inescapable consequence of the character's present life circumstances" (96). In Raelene's case, it is precisely her present situation —together with the choices she made in her past— that condemns her. We see her prison, even the place where she lives is presented as a cell, but she does not look for a remedy. Or even worse, she has such low self-esteem that considers it impossible to start a new life without a man's help: "No, she was really more frightened of being alone. The girls'd never be enough for her. She needed a bloke, she hadn't been without one since she was thirteen years old and now it was just unthinkable. The only way she'd leave Max was in the protection of another man. She needed a rescuer" (146). This dependency on men that Raelene shows is more than questionable. Tim Winton has dealt with accusations of misogyny for some of his characterizations of women and Raelene's case could generate a debate. The fact that she does not report Max to the police is proof of a tendency towards self-threatening behaviour, as it is the recognition of her own personal taste for tough guys: she openly rejects sensitivity in men: "Rae didn't go men who dressed fancy or slapped on aftershave. She was a bit suss about tv men who talked about their feelings all the time and men who cried gave her the screaming creeps" (137). Some lines later, we

learn about the *romantic* night in which she met the love of her life: “he stared at her like a hungry man, like she was food, and it made her feel powerful” (137).

From that moment on, her fate is written. That is the man she will share her life with. It is a traditional view of a relationship that she, in a way, inherits from her family: “he’d always been Raelene’s kind of bloke, the sort of man her sisters always had, the kind their mother flirted with” (136). Curiously enough, it is a traditional view that Sherry shares for different reasons, even knowing the terrible fact that Raelene is mistreated: “Love conquers all. You just need a little faith to see you through, Rae. You’re a good wife, a good mother. Everything happens for a purpose, you know. You’ll be alright, I just know it” (138). The reader learns afterwards that Sherry is talking from experience and from her own Christian conception of life. This is still surprising: she is telling a mistreated woman not to abandon her husband. Sherry is presented as a complex woman with a mysterious aura around her, unlike Raelene, described as simple and stuck.

It already happened in “Big World”, and in “The Turning”, Winton repeats the successful strategy that he used in the first story of the collection: the two protagonists, the two friends, are presented in opposition, as if facing each other to make clear the distinction. Sherry is a stylish woman who does not belong to White Lane: “She was no stuck-up bitch. She was a real surprise, out of the ordinary” (135). However, the real distinctive trait, is that in all the time she spends with her in the laundry, “she never once mentioned Raelene’s face” (135). This silence is perceived as a sign of tact and respect. She knows, but she does not want Raelene to notice that she knows. She knows, but it does not matter. She sees Raelene, not her face. She is exactly the opposite to what usually happens in White Point. In that first conversation, they lay the foundations of a solid friendship. Sherry tells Raelene about the business her husband Dan has in the place, and

that is the reason they bought a house in White Point. The reader has indirect access to Raelene's mind when Sherry is described:

> There was something squeaky clean about Sherry. She was all wrong for White Point and wrong for Raelene but you couldn't help but like her, love her even. She was too bloody good-looking, for one thing, too beautiful to be believed. But she had something special. She listened. She gave a fuck. There was kindness in her. Straightaway she was a friend (135).

Friendship and its nuances are a constant topic throughout the story. Friendship has a redeeming power for Raelene, giving her a reason to go on. Throughout the short story, we see how she progressively develops a feeling of dependency —when Sherry is not around, she feels anxious— that reminds us of the characteristics of a toxic relationship. Sherry is the "turning" point in Raelene's life, and from that moment on she compares herself with her. She identifies with her, she wants to be her: The nature of the new relationship is analysed constantly in the text, as can be observed in the following examples:

> She wanted what they had, that special something, and when she looked down at the outline of Max snoring in her bed she bawled quietly and the effort to keep silent hurt worse than the beating (142).
>
> When she was with them they didn't make her feel low, they didn´t rub her nose in the mess she was. They lifted her up somehow (143).
>
> She wanted them both, wanted to be them (145).

Comparisons are hateful, and she is projecting herself and Max in the couple, leading her to an inevitable defeat. Together with the analysis of the nature of the relationship, there is the question of what makes Sherry so different. The answer is religion:

> So it's this, she murmured.

> This? Sherry said, sitting and crossing her lovely legs and raking her fingers through her hair.
>
> This! Said Rae. She slapped a hand down on one of the Bibles. (148)

One night that she is not expected, Raelene catches Sherry and her husband Dan reading the Bible. It is then that she pieces things together: the stories Sherry tells her kids (Jonah and the whale), her attitude towards life, her faith as a *turning* point. And there is also what the reader learns about Dan: he is not the perfect man, he used to be an alcoholic, and it was faith together with Sherry that saved him:

> And that's why the religious stuff?
>
> Partly, said Dan. Booze leaves a pretty big hole (148).

It is then that we learn that Dan is a vulnerable man too. Raelene wants to find a mirror in her own relationship with Max, but there is one difference: love. She is no longer in love with her husband; the two friends no longer share the same feelings. Before continuing with the nature of the relationship between Raelene and Sherry, an analysis of the two male characters —since they have a major influence in it— is also necessary. Max impersonates the perfect husband, handsome and attentive, but he is in White Point looking for a second opportunity. Contradictorily enough, the place that turns out to be hell in earth for Raelene (White Point), has a redemptive connotation for Dan: it is his second chance. He is a recovering alcoholic, and this place is helping save him.

The character of Dan fits the idea of some men that Hannah Schurholz develops: "These confessions are the epitome of the wounded 'man-in-crisis" who, in the process of redefining himself and his position in society, seeks reconciliation with the world around him" (106). Dan is a man-in-crisis that has found something to hold on: faith and his new job in White Point. In contrast, Max's decadence is narrated throughout the story, both physically and in his behaviour:

> But Max was getting a gut now. After years of slanging cray-pots his back was stuffed. There was no way he´d be able to hold her up against a pool shed anymore. His teeth weren´t great and under his new beard his mouth was turning down at the sides like a man disappointed. Raelene couldn't pin down when it was thar Max turned sour. Maybe when the girls came along. (137)

He unburdens himself with insults, but this only reflects a major problem: he is bitter, in the pub they called him Aggro Max, and he pays his own complexes with scenes of brutal violence towards his wife. He is nothing but a poor man. Max impersonates the figure of what Winton calls toxic masculinity **(**Elliot). The Australian writer, who has been accused of misogyny (see Saliah Ben-Messahel's interview), coins another interesting concept: masculine misogyny: the misogyny of men towards sensitive men. The author reflects on the idea that sensitive men tend to be rejected —as Raelene explicitly does—He, in an interview in ABC News Australia in 2018, talks about a systemic action that leads men towards patriarchy and misogyny, a modelling on "how to be a man" (Elliot). This systemic action that dismembers sensitive and nurturing qualities in men, would be, according to Winton, "stopping men from growing. They become emotional infants, little man-boys who despise women and lean on them in equal measure" (Elliot). Max impersonates this figure of a masculine man who despises women. He rapes his wife repeatedly. In a very symbolic scene, which I consider as a turning point in the story, he rapes his wife when he comes back home, while she is almost asleep. She abandons herself to him out of boredom, she does not want to resist, but even though she does not want it to happen, she ends up *"coming despite herself"* (140). This is, for me, an epitome of Ralene's own personal failure: she has abandoned herself to a point in which she can feel pleasure in her prison. As if she did not want to fight anymore.

There is a third masculine figure in the story: Jesus. He is sexualized by the protagonist: “She liked the dinky birds and his rock star hair and how his chest looked, bared by the billowing robe. He had real pecs and a six-pack. Like a bodybuilder. He was ripped” (155). The desacralization of faith that Winton uses in this passage makes the non-Christian reader to feel closer to the religion. Winton, a self-declared Christian, is skillful in the treatment of religion, since it offers it as a valid alternative to save a life. Jesus, in fact, is the man who saves Raelene. Nonetheless, the question of faith is impersonated in Sherry: the actual reincarnation of faith. Religion, in this case, is a feminine entity, it fills the unbearable gap in Raelene’s life: it is her who brings Jesus to the protagonist’s life. There is a symbolic moment, during the trip to Perth, when Raelene enters a shop and buys a dome with the figure of Jesus. In the final scene of the story, when Max is brutally attacking her, she sees the dome and feels saved, as Sherry once saver her. In that moment, she experiences her own epiphany.

Faith, as has been discussed, would not be present in the story without the figure of Sherry. She is her saviour, yes, but what kind of salvation? Is it just a spiritual salvation? In the end, she cannot prevent Max from beating her friend. The open-ending closure of the story, “she had already outlived him”, when we have Max assaulting Raelene and tearing open her insides, leaves the reader with the question. The friendship has cooled after Sherry’s turn of mind during the trip: she tells Raelene to leave Max, and Raelene does not react well. The friendship staggers as it happened in “Big World”. The reader thinks it is convenience that has joined them: Sherry is a refuge for Raelene; Raelene is someone to be cared, a good opportunity for Sherry to show her Christian values. However, the moment she encourages Raelene to change her life, the moment she questions her routine, she vanishes. In “Big World”, Biggie was convenient for Max as long as he lived in Angelus. But, what about the future? Similarly, Sherry makes

Raelene's life habitable, but, what is going to happen with that special bond? In any case, Sherry gives Raelene reasons to continue and a purpose in life: she has already opened the door —religion. What happens beyond this point, as in "Big World", is not relevant. The ending leaves Sherry contemplating the dome, as the narrator in "Big World" contemplated the lake. Together with them, their friends: Sherry, who made the dome and its meaning possible, and Biggie, who made the trip real.

CONNECTING STORIES: PARALELLISMS BETWEEN FRIENDHIPS AND PLOTS IN "BIG WORLD" AND "THE TURNING"

The nameless first-person narrator of "Big World" finds its reflection in the newcomer to White Point, Sherry. Both are sensitive characters that have aspirations in life: they belong to the city and recur to inner life as a mechanism to deal with existence. In contrast, Raelene and Biggie parallel each other: they live a practical life, they represent the non-attractive part of the binomial of the relationship, they seem to be condemned. Sherry and the narrator of "Big World" stand for the city, the strangers in a place, while Raelene —unwillingly—, and Biggie —on purpose— belong to small towns and are, in a way, trapped in the place. They cannot broaden their horizons. This dichotomy of characters is purely Wintonian. As McCredden points out,

> Tim Winton has won a reputation as an Australian novelist of local and national place, and of belonging, a Western Australian with a rich imaginative grasp of city and country, small town, beach, ocean and desert… However, it should also be recalled that Winton is also a writer of urban and suburban places. (107)

This combination of landscapes and atmospheres is easily traced in the two short stories. In addition to this, it should be remarked that these landscapes have a major effect on the character's minds and attitudes. There are two epiphanic moments that mirror each

other. On the one hand, the narrator's final contemplation of the lake with Biggie, in which he feels wholly alive; on the other, Raelene's walk home in a stormy beach, alone, in the middle of the night, gazing at the stars and feeling liberated for a moment. She lives her own epiphany, the moment she feels closer to God. Is it faith? It is just after that walk that she recalls the figure of her father, another masculine figure: "But still at the core of it, that high sweet voice, her father's, faceless forever in the dark" (150). The symbolism of the scene is outstanding: she thinks of other fires, she recalls memories of her childhood, "a long flat estuary and the shadows of trees and the smells of prawns cooking…" (150). Salhia Ben-Messahel suggests that in *Dirt Music* "memories unexpectedly rebound on the individual like a boomerang". This quote is also applicable to the reality of the short story and to many works in Winton's oeuvre. With the explicit reference to his father, the reader knows how much Raelene misses him, the struggle to remember him, and the emptiness he left in her life: "He was just a hole in her life now, no more than a shape, something she wanted but couldn't really remember" (153). We come to realize that two apparently opposing characters, Raelene and the narrator of *"*Big World*",* find themselves connected by nature. Regarding friendship, there is another idea to consider: those epiphanic moment happen exclusively in the character's inner lives. Raelene has just left Sherry's house and the first-person narrator is accompanied by Biggie, but they are just background landscape. In these epiphanic moments, friendship stands aside: it is not the companionship that matters —and these are short stories about companionship and how the presence of right people can save us—, but there are certain moments in life that we must face alone.

In structural and narrative terms, there is in "The Turning" another moment that echoes "Big World": the trip to Perth. The narrator and Biggie in the latter are escaping from the provincial life in Angelus and their fail in the exams; Sherry is taking Raelene

to Perth to give her a free day, a respite from her marriage, a violence-free space. The images in the car echo each other. The journey is a metaphor of life and life is better with good company. The destination also coincides. However, what is supposed to be a friendly trip ends up distancing them. The narrator in "Big World" feels jealous when he sees Biggie flirting with the hitchhiker and notices his own selfishness: he feels well with Biggie because he feels superior to him; Raelene acts defensively when Sherry advises her to leave Max:

> I´ve got no money.
>
> I´ll give you money.
>
> You´re paying me to leave him?
>
> Rae.
>
> What about love conquers all?
>
> Nobody has to put up with —
>
> And commitment? And forgiveness? All that stuff you talk, it´s just talk then? (151).

When the nature of the relationship is altered, there is another feeling —typical in friendship— that is introduced: betrayal: "It was like a betrayal. She'd never once judged her before (151). Winton is saying, in a way, that friendship has always a component of interest. If we think of the closure of both stories, the relationships do not seem to endure the passing of time. We do not even know if Raelene is alive and we know, for sure, that Biggie is not going to be alive in a year's time. The nature of the relationships is transient. It is, in narrative terms, enough for a short story, but not, at least in this case, enough to complete a novel.

CONCLUSION

The close reading of the short stories “Big World” and “The Turning” has proved useful to understand Winton’s conception of human nature and human relationships. The two topics are continuedly explored in Winton’s work and these two stories explore in depth the nature of human existence and the inevitable influence of circumstances —location, companionships, personal struggles— in our passage through life. This dissertation has also shown that, even though Winton’s characters live in Western Australia and suffer from the limits of location, there are certain rituals in life that we all are susceptible to go through: adolescents rebel, marriages do not always work, family units can be damaged and friendship can matter more than love. Tim Winton is usually considered a local writer. This is undeniable, but this essay also proves the universality of his themes.

> Love is the universal theme par excellence in the history of literature —and probably in the history of humankind. However, friendship has not been dealt with so thoroughly as love, something which makes Winton’s work even more interesting, as friendship plays a major role in our existence. The close exploration of the nature of this relationship and its infinite nuances is the major contribution of this dissertation. The reader observes the awakening and the decadence of the feeling in both short stories and the common journey of the characters until the closure of the plot: friendship can be a transient relationship, influenced —even more than love— by personal circumstances. Under different circumstances, or even in different geographical locations, the narrator and Biggie in “Big World” and Raelene and Sherry in “The Turning” would not have ever crossed each other’s paths.

These are stories about the passing of time, the transience of relationships and the impossibility to forget. When asked about the change of direction of the characters in the collection, Tim Winton answered:

> It was interesting, finding my way with those characters. Change of direction? Well, they're just stories. I mean, I love the form, and I liked returning to it, but why ask *me* where I'm going? I can't even decide where I've been (Rossiter, 38).

This is really a statement about his conception of writing. He does not know where to go, but the reader enjoys the ride.

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